



## TESTIMONY

of the

### CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES

to the

#### PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

*Concerning the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan*

March 18, 2009

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local governments - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the state Conservation and Development Policies Plan, commonly called the State Plan of Conservation and Development (Plan of C&D).

CCM supports cooperative land-use planning among the State, towns and cities. This strengthens communities, preserves the environment and helps the economy by improving transportation systems. The State, councils of government or other regional organizations can help solve regional problems while ensuring that all communities have a say in decision-making.

#### Consistency among local, regional and state plans

The Working Group recommended requiring that "local and regional C&D plans be consistent with the State C&D plan." Although CCM appreciates the intent behind this proposal, it takes the wrong approach. The approach should be bottom-up, not top-down. The State plan of conservation and development should be informed by local and regional plans, not the other way around.

Local plans are adopted through a very public process – a process that is much more accessible to the public than those of regions and the State. The process allows community groups and individuals to provide comment that is incorporated into the plan. It's a grassroots process that ensures a community's vision is included in the plan. This vision is then incorporated into the regional plan. Regional plans should then inform the State plan.

Unless the "bottom-up" approach is taken, local officials and citizens would object to proposals that would give more authority to the state C&D Plan. It would be viewed as a series of diktats by the State, rather than a living document – and it may not always be consistent with the reality on the ground in the communities affected by it.

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The 2007 report by the legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee on Regional Planning Organizations included a **survey of municipal officials** on a variety of subjects. **Two-thirds of the 85 respondents disagreed that projects within a town should be required to adhere to the state C&D Plan.** That is not surprising: only 53% thought their own *region's* plan "reflects the development issues" in their towns. Imagine how they view the more distant state plan. On the other hand, 84% thought their *local* plans were effective in controlling development for their community. Faith in the plans of the State and regions will only change with a new approach that methodically builds the regional plans from local plans and the State plan from the regional plans.

**The next revision of the C&D Plan should be postponed until improvements can be made in the way in which information is gathered from municipalities and regions.** This is not intended to be criticism of OPM or the way in which it has put together the Plan in the past. It does its best with limited staff resources. In the current state-budget climate, it is unlikely that staffing for this purpose will be increased, making postponement all the more appropriate.

Further, requiring that the local plans be consistent with the State plan could make for additional costly mandates to regional planning agencies and municipalities. Every year, there are several bills that would add on responsibilities to the state C&D Plan. If such proposals are passed, regions and communities would then have to incorporate those same requirements into their own plans, possibly incurring additional costs.

#### **Definition of "smart growth"**

The Working Group also recommended that the State "adopt a concise definition of Smart Growth." It is extremely important that the definition have the proper scope and flexibility, because significant amounts of funding to municipalities may be tied to whether projects meet the definition of smart growth. The definition has to allow for local and regional innovation.

CCM looks forward to working with you on proposals to improve coordination between local, regional and state planning, while ensuring that Connecticut's unique quality of life, which is so essential to our economic success as well, is preserved.

Thank you.

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If you have any questions, please call Gian-Carl Casa or Ron Thomas, at (203) 498-3000.